

PUTTING A WELCOME ON NEW YORK'S MAT

In His Home-town Papers, En Route by Land and Sea, the Stranger Is To Be Told Why This City Is Just the Place for a Visit

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Such Is To Be the Warmth of Greeting That in the Blue-Book Hills of Manhattan There'll Be No Trail of Lonesome Visitors

MEN tell of the hospitality of the Arabs, who, if you believe everything you hear about these sheiks, protect the traveler who has partaken of their salt.

Men tell, too, of the munificence of the courtly dons and hidalgos of Spain, whose guests need only express admiration of any of their host's possessions to be presented with it.

A byword in this broad land of ours is good old-fashioned Southern hospitality.

And now a new proverb is about to be hung up in the annals of welcome.

"Welcome, Stranger! Welcome!"

Where was it you said? We didn't quite catch that. What? Once more, please. You don't say! Well, well! Welcome, Stranger, to New York!

Will a Stranger in Town Admit That He's One?

The latchstring is out. That tagged key to the hotel room the clerk gives a visitor is to be considered as the key to the city. Such was the sense of the meeting at the offices of the hotel association the other day, and the views of 114 hoteliers were supported by civic, educational, industrial and recreational organizations of New York. The good word was, the meeting decided, to increase the general understanding of the city's advantages and help visitors to take advantage of these facilities, dispelling the mistaken notion that these facilities take advantage of the visitors.

So the good word or the slogan—what is a campaign without a slogan—is "Welcome, Stranger," and it seems an excellent plan, always providing we know who is a stranger and what is a welcome.

First puzzle, then: Find the stranger. Are there any such in New York, and, if so, will they admit it?

It can be imagined that it would be rather disconcerting to a welcomer to accost a person who looks like a stranger, only to have the old codger turn out to be the oldest inhabitant. Or to have the welcomee turn savagely at him and snort: "Stranger? Stranger nuthin'. I wuz here back in '96; stayed two days, too."

Whereat the welcomer will apologize and state in the crass, commercial argot of the day that he was merely trying to "sell" him New York. And the welcomee will sniff that folks around here are going some, because back in '96 they only tried to sell him the Brooklyn Bridge.

No, it's a needle in a haystack proposition. The stranger, the more savoir faire. The only infallible talisman by which a stranger in New York may be spotted is to note some one who when in Rome is outdoing the Romans.

The stranger snared, how to welcome him? There's the rub, and the committee knows it. Without a doubt, improvement is possible over the methods of the past.

Under the old regime a stranger may have doubted whether he was welcome to New York. If he arrived by train a brakeman walked through the car crying, "Noo Yawk, Noo Yawk," without adding a single word as to the city's advantages, or if he arrived in the early morning the Pullman porter unceremoniously tweaked the sheets and without so much as an invocation announced that our city would be reached in fifty-five minutes. The visitor would be just so interested in New York he would turn over and go to sleep again.

Once in the city, the visitor would taxi to a hotel, where the door of the cab would be opened by a field marshal or an admiral in full regalia. Making all haste to turn the vehicle over to this distinguished personage, who, of course, was no other than the doorman, the visitor would dismount and allow his baggage to be held for ransom by bellboys. As a favor a frigid hotel clerk would let him have a room.

Father Knickerbocker Doesn't Mean To Be Rude

Out shopping, the visitor would ask directions of a lady behind a counter, only to be snubbed: At the box office of a theater that night he would inquire for tickets vainly.

"The folks that live hereabouts," the seller would inform him, "came around a bit ahead of time and got the good seats. But you



The hotel proprietor welcomes his guests in person, after the manner and in the guise of the old-time innkeeper

might try that advance-price agency next door which somehow or other got a hold of some of them."

The visitor felt that, while Father Knickerbocker had expected him and had a spare room, the old gentleman had remarked: "You will have to excuse me, old chap. I'm awfully busy. Just knock around the place and amuse yourself, and if there's anything you want, ask for it."

Some Think It Restful Not to Know Anybody

There are some who are of the opinion that those are the best tactics to take. A great deal of New York's charm, they say, lies in the fact that a person may come here and be under the necessity of knowing nobody. He can shed the home-town obligations. Even his personal feelings and reactions on the weather may be his own business.

But it's planned that things be different now, with the Welcome, Stranger, committee in action. Of it and for it are hotels, railroads, chambers of commerce, merchants, libraries, museums, boards of health, police, Will Hays and Mayor Hylan. If there are any who dare stand forth in the face of that imposing array they are the flat-dwelling families with one extra room and many out-of-town relatives, and even they will likely fall in line, if the word "stranger" is strictly construed.

This committee is going to welcome strangers and "fight it out on those lines if it takes all summer." Just how? Well, lots of ways.

Bear in mind that the committee is quite new and has barely started to combat.

Mine host of the oldtime inn knew how to do it. Song and story has fringed for us the jolly old boniface standing in his wide-flung portals and smiling expansively as the stage coach rolled up. How cheerily he would greet each guest and lead him by the most direct route to the wainscoted taproom, there to quaff flagons of sack and recount such rare yarns and lays as Longfellow has immortalized in his "Tales of a Wayside Inn."

Perhaps the make-up of yore would prove effective, and we soon may see the manager, even the proprietor, of one of the 114 hoteliers represented in the committee out under the glass canopy ready to beg arriving guests to take their ease in his inn, as Mr. Levering has so graphically indicated in the illustration. The field marshal of the door, of course, would be choiced away behind a column so nobody would shy at him.

The Innkeepers of Old Know the Tricks

It is to be feared that the brimming flagons of sack are out of the question. That's a good deal of the trouble. As for the yarns and lays of old, the host might no sooner open the door of the taxicab than he would seize the traveler by the buttonhole and begin breathlessly: "Two Irishmen were walking down the street. Pat says to Mike, etc., etc."

And the traveler, just to keep up his part, might reply: "Here's a good one a fellow in th'

smokin' car told me. It seems that in Paris," etc., etc.

But no. It wouldn't do. Welcome, where art thou?

Let the Police Serve Summons of Welcome

But there must be some way to greet the millions who blow in annually. Let us turn from the past to Minneapolis, if that is not too severe a wrench. It is said it is the custom in those parts that when a policeman sights a motor car with a license tag of another state he halts it and hands the driver a long envelope. The terrified driver thinks he has received a summons, but reads within words to the effect: "Report to the Automobile Club. Mr. So-and-So has been assigned to entertain you." There is the germ of a thought. But perhaps we might better phrase it: "Report to the 'Follies.' Miss So-and-So has been assigned to entertain you. Welcome, Stranger!"

It is the sense of the committee that a sort of preparatory barrage be laid down for the welcome. Even while back in the home town strangers must be made to realize that New York, when called cold and inhospitable, not to say unsafe, is slandered.

For instance, there are all those alarming stories that appear in the home-town paper under a New York date line, such as the yarn that bobbed up in Oklahoma under the head: "Much Hooch Sold in New York Hotels." The hotels might come right back and furnish that paper with a counter story under the head: "No Hooch Sold in New York Hotels. It Flows in Restaurants." This should properly be followed by a manifesto by the health commis-

sioner that New York's milk supply is the safest in the world.

It's unfortunate the committee can't run such a jolly catch phrase on its letterhead to strangers as, "Eat, drink and be welcome," for it would be a catch phrase in very sooth. Strangers cannot legally be invited to "drink" in the generally accepted sense of the beverage. The published attitude of the hotel association on prohibition asks only equal enforcement. And, whether you take that as a request or a promise, it is nothing to be gayly anticipative about.

Unlike the horse of the proverb, you can lead a stranger to water in a hotel and induce him to drink it because there's nothing else. But, ah! the grief when they tie the old nose-bag on the stranger in the hotel restaurant. He regards the menu soberly and sadly, and, like the Chinese, he reads it from right to left. He's not interested in the gastronomy or the French of it, but in the mathematics. Where once he would exuberantly order the breast of a partridge he's now satisfied with the egg of a hen. From the point of view of receipts, two checks must spring up where one sprang before.

The Bar Was a Great Promoter of Appetites

Something must be done about it in advance. Strangers must be welcomed, and more of 'em. Their minds must be prepared beforehand. The prospective visitor reads in 'his home paper of a series of disturbing incidents in the great metropolis of the East and doubts if he feels adventurous enough to come on. That is where the committee may step in with copy for the paper showing that it's all a

matter of percentage—more people, more crime and scandal. If you figured it up on a per capita basis there would be some odious comparisons, with the odiousness outside of New York. As we remember it, some pretty hot stuff went on in Gopher Prairie, but it would not have got around at all if it hadn't been for Mr. Lewis.

The point is, the committee rises to state, that the commission of a crime is an overt act and the running of a museum, for example, is not. The result is that stories are sent out on the crime and aren't on the museum. The country reads columns about the discovery of somebody's torso, but it is treated only to a "couple of sticks" of type when they find the whole darn skeleton of a diplodocus.

Correcting Impression That New York Is Dangerous

That is an inequality which the committee is planning to remedy. There were, says a story, all in all, so many suicides in New York last year. There were, rebuts the committee, all in all so many who didn't commit suicide. A couple in a taxicab were held up in Central Park. Yes, but that very night so many more couples passed through Central Park in taxicabs without any rude interruption. An inexplicable clamor broke out on West Umpteenth Street last night and a woman was heard to scream. Ah, but you should have visited the opera the same evening.

Thus the committee will checkmate every move of those who maintain that New York's doormat does not bear the customary cordial characters. It's going to take time. There are a lot of logic-tight minds and hidebound frames outside of New York, but on *les auras*.

Consider, then, that the visitors are duly launched New Yorkward. That is where the railroads come in; not to speak of the grossly material matter of fares, but in the welcoming. It is planned that every conductor be an advance agent. Travelers will have all the dope even before arriving. And what an opportunity for those Pullman porter quartets when they are reported to be training! Let them eschew the sheet-tweaking act we have referred to. Let them herald the morn with a carol, such as "God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay." At which one of the portiers of the gentlemen may part the green portières and exclaim: "I say, that doesn't include upper berths, does it?"

It might not be a bad scheme to establish a ten-mile limit around the city. The train once within that, the porter when brushing off would say, when proffered a reward: "No, thank you, suh. We are now within the ten-mile limit of the great City of New York, and I can accept no gratuity. Thanking you just the same, suh. Welcome, Stranger."

Once the stranger is within our gates it may be possible to instill a spirit of disinterested welcome into our taxicab drivers. It is conceivable that hotel clerks may be induced to smile and proffer the pen of registration without conveying the idea that anything one writes will be used against one. It may be that the house detective can be persuaded for a moment to look unsuspicious. What can't be done when the committee really warms to its work?

There are other little measures that are not new with the hotel division but never fail to make a hit with a stranger. There's the placing of flowers in the room and the sending up of the morning paper with "Good Morning" stamped thereon. There's the snappy assistant manager who makes this a point of service and knowing, too, a guest's name. All these little things spell welcome.

Of Course, Lowered Rates Might Be of Help

And, by gracious! Here's a hunch that nobody seems to have thought of: There's the lowering of rates!

It's the darndest thing about strangers and the public generally. They just won't complain. Rather than say anything they worry along somehow. And yet, they are that sensible of intimations of welcome they'd be bound to respond if there was some downward revision of those figures on the menu and in the cashier's office that aggregate so.

By such means as that, by bureaus of copious information, by guides with kindly counsel, New York would rid itself of the stigma of being known as the loneliest city in the world, where strangers starve for companionship and entertainment in the midst of plenty.

You couldn't tell where it would end, everybody would get feeling so welcome. The day might come when we would have to send over to Ellis Island for some of the immigration officials and get them into action. And forth by radio, wire and mail would go the bulletin:

This month's quota of "Strangers, Welcome," from Idaho, Arizona, Jugo-Slavia and New Jersey is exhausted. However, welcome other strangers!